

WRITING SKILLS TEST – GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

What is the "Writing Skills Test"?

Welcome to the **Writing Skills Test** instructions booklet. This set of instructions is designed to introduce **two** timed writing tests you'll be taking near the beginning of Unit 4 - one during Week 13, the other during Week 15 in class.

To help you practice for real-world entrance exams into upper-division undergraduate study at 4-year colleges and universities after community college, a destination where many of you are bound, I have modeled these timed tests after an actual university-level writing skills test given to students transferring into a Bay Area university. But it's a typical writing proficiency exam you're likely to see at most colleges accepting transfer students like you, and it's designed to ensure that you possess the foundational writing ability required to succeed at a higher level of study at those institutions.

The skills you need to succeed on this timed writing test are also, coincidentally, the ones *our* class is designed to teach - which is why you're being asked to take the writing test now rather than earlier in the term. (Incidentally, the reading and writing skills tested here are also skills you'll use regularly throughout your academic and professional careers if they involve any kind of writing.)

In any case, timed in-course writing is a required skill and element of the course that must be folded into your coursework and course grade, so here we are. Please read below to find out how, where, and when to submit your exam essays.

To help you prepare for these 2 writing tests, in addition to this set of explanations and the grading rubric provided for you to see how I actually evaluate your essays and grade them, I've included four general in-class writing resources in the **on the Wednesday, April 9 agenda** for you to study. Please read all of these resource links carefully before the writing tests - they contain useful information that's designed to help you succeed at timed writing events like this one.

** Note that these writing exams will not be linked to your existing Unit 4 reading - they're meant to be independent instruments that measure your core writing proficiencies only, without being linked to other unit materials from this course or any other.*

How will the essay exams be graded?

The timed, in-course writing tests this unit (there are two of them remember, one each in Weeks 13 and 15) are required course components that **you may take only once each but that you must pass with a grade of "Clear Competence" from the Grading Rubric**. Please study that grading rubric very carefully to see what you have to do in order to pass these required writing tests. Your essay submission must meet the requirements outlined in the Clear Competence column of that rubric in order to pass. Passing essays will then be quick graded (w/ limited comments and feedback) by me using the same 20-point essay scale you've seen me use in your essays. These essay scores will then be included in your **Essay course component score**. Submissions will be filtered for plagiarized language.

Your exams essays must each be **a minimum of 4 fully developed paragraphs** in order to be considered for credit, and they must be very well proofread for sentence errors. Each test is worth **20 points**, just like your regular essays, and after receiving an initial score of "Clear Competence" from the special exam Grading Rubric I've given you, I'll use the same standard grading rubric that I use for your regular essays to give it a numerical score for the grade book.

This essay will **not** be eligible for the rewrite option given the point in the term at which you'll be taking the tests and given the fact that the test is designed to measure your ability to independently create a coherent and cohesive argumentative essay within a timed setting and without being able to revise your work based on external feedback.

What will I be looking for in your work?

You'll have to be your own best critical reader and proofreader as you create your essay, and the test is designed to get you to do just that. That said, my standards will be adjusted somewhat to account for the in-class nature of the test and the limited time you'll have to compose the essay. But I will need to see clean, coherent, cohesive, well proofread, thesis driven work in each essay in order to pass them, regardless.

Your essay will be graded based on these factors (after I have first filtered for the 3 core areas I listed on the Writing Skills Test General Instructions sheet at the top of the unit, namely: thesis construction, paragraph development and sentence control):

1. Quality of insight or central idea(s)
2. A clear sense of audience in your writing work
3. Clarity and conciseness - in your language *and* ideas
4. A consistent point of view held throughout your entire discussion
5. Cohesion, strength and logic of your supporting information
6. Appropriateness of your language to the academic subject you're taking up in your discussion (i.e. no slang or colloquial language)
7. Correctness of sentence mechanics and word usage

Your essay must receive an initial scoring of "**Clear Competence**" in order for it to receive a passing grade. Clear Competence is defined this way:

The essay demonstrates basic competence in writing at the rhetorical and syntactical levels (the ideas are well developed and the language is well controlled and proofread). The essay has a thesis that adequately addresses the topic. The paragraphs are logically organized and developed with appropriate details and examples. The writer responds to the writing task in a direct and comprehensive manner. Sentences show an overall competence with the language in form and structure. Sentence types are varied and complex. Minor errors in grammar or punctuation do not interfere with meaning.

Ultimately, I'll be looking for these things:

- 1) **Strong thesis work that is a direct response to your given writing prompt**
- 2) **Competent sentence construction and control**
- 3) **Effective paragraph development that includes clear topic arguments that extend the thesis and direct use of specific examples for support and illustration**

Show me you know how to control your sentences consistently throughout a short essay, show me you can compose well-built internal paragraphs that utilize specific examples in your analysis and illustration work, and show me you can create a convincing argument that responds directly and specifically to your writing prompt and you'll do just fine. Think of this essay as a much shortened version of what you're being asked to do in your Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 essays for the class only without the external text to source and respond to.

Some additional composition tips:

In each of your exam essays, you will need to take a clear position on a different issue (based on the question prompt you're given for each test) and support all statements you make with credible evidence and sufficient explanation. You should also give yourself enough time to move methodically through **each step of the writing process**:

Step #1: Analyze the prompt and devise a working response to it

Step #2: Craft a strong thesis argument, one that's clear and explicit

Step #3: Prewrite and Draft: plan through lists, outlines and brainstorm your essay structure and main ideas, then make a fast draft version of your entire essay that can be changed and filled out on a second pass through for your final version

Step #4: Revise and edit your essay to create a finished piece of writing that answers the question prompt and defends your thesis argument in well developed internal paragraphs

Step #5: Proofread your essay sentence by sentence for errors so as to create 100% error-free work

These are some additional tips you should follow as you create your draft and final versions:

- Identify opposing views to your own to explore in your body paragraphs
- Be sure to offer valid reasons, explanations, and examples to support your thesis arguments
- For your thesis work, choose a side: you can be either completely for or against a topic or partially for or against, but you must take a clear position that favors one side of the debate you'll be responding to and participating in
- Use effective prewriting strategies to quickly generate raw material for your essay, things like clustering and brainstorming and outlining, in addition to just quick notes
- Look for 3-5 reasons in support of your thesis that you can use to anchor your internal paragraphs
- Avoid a thesis statement that simply lists your reasons, though. Instead, find a higher category that hints at, but does not specifically state, your reasons
- Remember to create good topic argument statements for each internal paragraph and transition language to move from idea to idea, paragraph to paragraph
- Avoid vague or too brief or unsubstantiated opinions
- Support your thesis and topic arguments with lots of examples, personal anecdotes, facts and data, etc.
- Leave enough time to proofread your work

How to take the actual essay exams:

You will not be given the actual exam prompt until you begin the test. The test will be given to everyone in class at once, and you will 85 minutes to create your essay exam response on paper for me before turning it in at the end of class. You may bring with you for reference any of the materials I've linked on the test day's agenda in GregTeach that are relevant to the exam. **Books and digital devices will not be allowed while you're taking the exam.**

The writing test prompts will all ask you to weigh a general rule the test question will posit about society or culture, and then you'll need to formulate a coherent, thesis-driven and well supported argumentative response. Note that in these tests you won't be required to cite or reference any given outside text either - while you may choose to in your discussion work, it's by no means required because the test is measuring how well you can form and support an argument, not how well you can interact with texts.

Here is a sample essay question prompt to give you an idea of what your question prompts will look like - they'll be very similar in form and tone to this one:

Sample Question Prompt: *Some people believe that one should always be honest and truthful, while others believe that under certain circumstances it is acceptable to be dishonest or not tell the truth. Is lying ever permissible? Make sure you support your position with reasons, explanations and examples.*

As you can see from this sample prompt, the questioners are asking you to write an essay that's quite a departure from the kind of essay you've written for this class, in a few respects. It's allowing you to create an essay answer that's written from your own perspective using first person speech (I, me), it's allowing you to speak of your own experience as it relates to the question prompt, and it's not linked to a specific piece of reading. However, none of those aspects mean that your essay should not still be a formal, thesis-driven interrogation of a given set of ideas, supported by detailed and explicit reasoning, discussion and material examples, and academic speech and argumentative patterns. It should, and it will need to be.

For each test you will be given only one 85-minute window in class. The entire essay must be written and submitted during that period in order to be considered for credit.

Again, you will take the first test in Week 13 and the second during Week 15. Once submitted, I will give them summary comments that you'll receive back from me along with your letter grade in the grade book.

Both tests must be taken by the end of their assigned weeks, no later, for credit. Late submitted tests will not be accepted for credit and will receive a 0 in the grade book. Both tests must be passed with a mark of "Clear Competence" from the Grading Rubric I've given you before I will grade them. Students whose essay submissions do not receive an initial scoring of "Clear Competence" will be contacted individually by me and asked to retake the exam before I will grade it. **A passing score (14 points or higher) is required on each exams in order to pass the class.** And again, rewrites will not be allowed for these two tests - the passing score you initially receive on each will be the final mark in the grade book.

Good luck!